

and tied with grosgrain ribbon  
or the rainbow-streaked georgette.  
When loose, I could sit on it.  
They said, "She can sit on her hair,"  
as if it were an acrobatic feat.  
"But look at her, thin like that.  
It's a sin to let her strength all run  
to hair. Cut it off," the beautician chided.  
So Mother cut my hair, or had it done,  
my long black shining hair. Then  
I could sit on it all right, step on it  
in fact, where it lay on the floor  
like a herd of snakes.  
"I want my hair back," I cried.  
"Oh, you'll look cute," the operator sniffed,  
and took another whack, then it was done.

Contrary to expectation,  
none of this put any meat on me,  
nor was I cute.  
For I had lost my mane, my tossing  
mantle, my purse handles.

Now, in middle age, at last  
after years of cutting hair,  
the cure must finally  
have been efficacious.  
No longer thin  
as a sheep bone in the grass, a wheat straw,  
a glass stirring rod, a thread  
pulled from a hem, long and thin but strong,  
I am soft, soft, substantial.  
I do have strength,  
more than expected.  
Who knows? As I get older,  
maybe I'll grow my hair  
and sit on it.

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CODA:

Here's to crackpot theories,  
opinionations pressed on helpless children,  
may these good intentions stick  
where they belong,  
in the teeth  
like seeds from wild blackberries.

— Barbara Drake

Yamhill OR